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ABSTRACT

Three issues involved in staff development in the junior-community college are discussed. These issues are: (1) the impact of the history of the community college on both staff recruitment and development, (2) the characteristics, both cognitive and affective, of the "new" non-traditional student, and (3) the interaction of the "new" staff with these "new" students and how each is made most productive for the other. (DB)

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HUMANIZING COMMUNITY-JUNIOR COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT:

TOWARD CHANGE-

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

The question of staff development in the junior-community college especially as it concerns multi-ethnic staffs and student bodies is clearly not a single problem. Indeed the question involves minimally at least three principal issues:

1. The impact of the history of the community college on both staff recruitment and development.

2. The characteristics, both cognitive and affective, of the "new", non-traditional student.

3. The interaction of the "new" staff with these "new" students and how to make each most productive for the other.

I would like to address myself briefly to each of these three issues.

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History of the Community College

As we all know the junior-community college (I will hereinafter simply use the term "community college") developed in its original role to be an elitist duplicate of the four year institutions to which most of its graduates were deemed ultimately to be bound. The term elitist is used in the sense that most two year

institutions around the turn of the century had the identical restrictive entrance requirements as the senior colleges and thus their impact on increasing educational opportunity for minorities was minimal.

These institutions, in their continued evolution, began to also offer vocational technical training of a sufficiently highly skilled nature that was either beyond the capability of secondary institutions or outside the area of interest of the senior colleges.

It was not, however, until the "boom" in the tremendous growth of community colleges, almost all occurring after World War II, that the concept of "open-door" institutions for usually non-admissable, non-traditional students became the guiding force for community college expansion.*

The problems created by the community college "boom" were manifold. Among the most important problems were, 1) the lag in perception of the change in role of the community college from its elitist function to its "open door" function on the part of the staff, indeed, even today such perceptual lag is evident in substantial numbers of faculty members; 2) moreover, the true meaning of "open door", that is, that it places the greatest burden of responsibility on the staff and not the students is a conception that many college staff members arrive at only reluctantly and with considerable effort; and 3) to meet the needs of the new student population generated by the

* For example at Wayne County Community College: assessment results on reading scores for entering freshmen show range: 4.3 to 13+ grade level, average: 9.9 grade level.

open door, mostly non-white, many colleges have made token efforts to recruit non-white staff, which immediately raises ages-old questions of white staff attitudes, defining meaningful "standards" for recruitment and the generally entrenched institutional racism in colleges.

Characteristics of Non-traditional Students

Students who come to community colleges are increasingly characterized by the euphemsims "new" or "non-traditional". These students run the gamut of ability from being the top students in their high school graduating class to being, not only high school dropouts, but also having tested ability levels in reading and math at the fifth and sixth grade level (and sometimes below). Often the preponderant concentration of these students is at the lower end of the gamut of ability. Although before World War II the majority of Black students who received any college training went to the Black institutions in the South, 1970 census figures show that over 50% of first time enrollments of non-whites in higher education is now in the community college.

The principal problem of staff in dealing with these students is quite frankly one of difference in race and class. In earlier days, students in higher education were selected from the same middle class, white background as were their teachers. They instantly "recognized" each other. Now the euphemism "non-traditional" primarily means: non-white, lower class, and exhibiting a different life style.* Moreover, many of these students possess

*For example a typical student profile at Wayne County Community College:
Average age--27; married--50%; working--75%; Veterans--15%
Average years out of high school--5 years; % high school graduates--75%.

positives and strengths which traditional assessment measures are inadequate to evaluate: work and life experiences, military experience, and travel and community experience of a unique kind. Most traditionally trained staff are incapable of utilizing, over and above assessing, these talents and abilities meaningfully.

Interaction of "New" Staff with "New" Students

The third issue that we address arises out of the first two: that is, the history of community colleges and their new patterns of staff recruitment, plus the problem of dealing with non-traditional students creates the problem of the interaction of staff with students, which in itself is the primary motivation for staff development as defined by today's forum. That is, the collision of traditional attitudes with non-traditional students creates many of the problems requiring in-service training. It is important to understand that the necessity for such training is almost equally needed for Black as well as white faculty. Let me say unequivocally that I believe Black staff, other criteria being relatively equal, are generally better able to understand and relate to non-traditional students. However, the selection processes and criteria generally used to recruit Black staff into colleges are such that those persons are selected who most nearly resemble their white colleagues, who then, to the latter's dismay, are often unable to relate to their "new" students any better than they are! Those non-white staff who could be most effective usually are too threatening to administrators of predominantly white institutions who interview them, and are thus usually not hired.

The interaction of new staff with new students creates several problems. There is the problem of objectively discerning the variability in life styles and learning styles that exists among students, and between students and staff, and programatically responding to this variability. There is furthermore, as staff becomes more heterogeneous, ethnically and in social class, recognized the concomitant deterioration in staff unity and the consequent confusion of students in interacting with staff who often articulate opposite and conflicting values, points of view and behaviors in interpreting institutional policies or in offering students academic guidance.

Development of In-Service Training for Staff Development

It is my contention that until the ramifications of the three issues briefly outlined above are addressed, a serious and thorough program of staff development cannot be developed, or will be, at best, piece-meal or responsive to symptoms and the putting out of immediate brush-fires rather than solving chronic institutional problems.

Such staff development, I insist, must begin with the President. He (or she) must have a clearly articulated pluralistic, anti-racist, multi-ethnic philosophy and institutional goal that is not rhetorical but has measurable constituent parts. Such a statement of mission must contain both long and short range plans for total institutional development with general time parameters attached to these plans. Most important the president must exercise strong leadership in the articulation, defense, and implementation of these goals.

Next, the governing body or Board of Trustees must make a formal commitment to this institutional philosophy or statement of mission developed by the President. This can be accomplished through Board-President retreats and workshops whose primary purpose is not public relations, but the education, understanding and, most important, unifying of the Board around the mission of the college. This can often be the most difficult task for a president to accomplish.*

Next the senior administrators of the college (that is, the deans, vice presidents, directors) must be required to build their divisional and program goals on the basis of the institutional philosophy and the President's mission statement. These administrators must articulate measurable objectives in their respective areas to achieve the objectives of the presidential program. Again this can be accomplished through extensive retreats and workshops whose primary purpose is education, understanding and unity under the leadership of the President.

It is only at this point, it seems to me, that serious and long-lasting staff development can even be initiated or successfully accomplished. Such development, based on the foregoing planning and organization, can be carried out primarily by senior staff with the cooperation of skilled outside group dynamics consultants where needed. Training programs should be established for department heads and directors in human

*In addition to the elected Board of Trustees, citizen involvement representative of the college's service district and the student body must be actively constructed. An informed citizenry can be a most powerful support to the president in not only establishing staff development programs but in informing students (who are after all their children) of institutional goals and intentions.

relations, anti-racism awareness, and leadership. It should not be surprising that many academic administrators also lack training in management skills and in goal-setting. Department heads and consultants can develop training in the same areas for faculty as well as for support staff. Moreover, faculty need to be made directly aware of the connection between their course outlines, instructional goals and the mission of the college. They additionally require training addressed to alternative teaching styles, cognizance of non-traditional student strengths, etc. External degrees and credit-by-examination should also be explored.

The support staff, which is usually ignored, must also be involved in staff development training. Amazing changes in morale can occur when support staff are aware of the mission of the college and how their own particular functions are vital to the image that the college presents to both the public and to students. Usually such training can be accomplished on a released time basis or during off-hours for compensation, often with college credit as an added incentive.

All such staff development programs must be planned with the involvement and cooperation of the people concerned. This is particularly true in areas where union bargaining units are firmly entrenched. In addition, students should be involved in the organization of staff development and can profit from similar convocations and seminars specifically addressed to them. Students need to know the goals of the institution. They also need to know the problems of the institution. They need to sit on Standing Committees. They need face-to-face meetings with staff in problem articulation, etc.

In summary, to humanize community college environments, serious staff development can only proceed from leadership and commitment at the top to a pluralistic, multi-ethnic, anti-racist, variable curriculum institution that addresses itself to meeting the needs of all its students. Such leadership must be based on a clearly articulated institutional philosophy and mission that recognizes that change only occurs through struggle. Such leadership must be prepared to hold all levels of staff accountable for the outcome of such a program, based on measurable criteria so that accountability is not just empty rhetoric, but is indicative of the fact that the philosophy of the institution is to provide leadership and to serve as a model of pluralism and anti-racism and not be merely a reflection of community mores.

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